HEADLINE:

BYLINE: Ena Aguilar Peláez

EDITOR: Alizeh Kohari

RESEARCHER:

TRANSLATOR, local language to English: Shannon Kirby

FACT CHECKER:

PHOTOS:

PHOTO CREDIT:

GRAPHICS EDITOR: MATT HANEY

KICKER:

QUOTE:

SAN PEDRO CAJONOS, OAXACA:

Silk came to these mountains in colonial times.

In 1523, the first *Bombyx mori* eggs arrived from Spain; 500 years later, artisans in six Zapotec communities continue to raise the offspring of those first Spanish silkworms. Moisés Martínez is one of them, a member of Artesanos de Seda de la Sierra Norte, a local manufacturing cooperative, and part of the government silkworm sanctuary, a modernist glass-and-concrete structure perched amid the mountains in northern Oaxaca.

The sanctuary was inaugurated in 2020. Well before that, in 2009, a European laboratory approached the artisans, asking to examine the eggs of the locally-raised silkworms, known as criollo, because they are fed leaves of morera criolla, a native mulberry tree. “In most silk-producing countries, the silkworms get sick but ours do not because criollo silkworms are very strong,” says Martínez. “That’s why they were interested in studying them.”

The request concerned the silk-raising communities. They did not want to hand over the eggs without a document certifying their place of origin. “I think protecting our silk is important because it’s produced differently than in other countries,” says Martínez. “We don’t leave the silkworm inside the cocoon and harvest the silk; we first let the worms leave in moth form. This is a teaching that came from our grandmothers — they taught us to respect the natural cycle.” Artisans gathered to decide how to proceed, among them women as old as 95. “When they asked us for the eggs, we held an assembly to ask permission from the *abuelitas* because they are very careful with their things — and to respect the legacy that they have left us. But they refused to let us send our eggs far away.”

As crafts from Oaxaca — black pottery, woven textiles like *huipiles* and *quechquémitl* and palm-leaf items~~crafts~~ ~~leaf hats~~ dating back to the pre-Hispanic era, handspun silk and wool introduced during colonial times, as well as more recent creations such as vibrant wood figurines called *tonas* — garner international interest and customers, the communities

producing them have become more cognizant of their intellectual property rights. “Most handicrafts are creations that leave the hands of those who make them — or the place where they are made — in anonymity when they are sold or resold by third parties,” says Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, director of Museo Estatal de Arte Popular de Oaxaca. “This characteristic makes them vulnerable in a global market with plagiarism and cultural appropriation.”

Over time, in Oaxaca, says Pedro Martínez, each type of handicraft came to be made by families in particular towns and areas, making it possible to know their geographical provenance.

In Teotitlán del Valle, a small town in the central Oaxacan valley, Florencio Contreras has been weaving woollen rugs on a wooden loom for the past forty years — a craft his father taught him. In 2006, when the region was racked by protests and tourism dwindled, Contreras began travelling outside Oaxaca state to sell his rugs. That was when he began thinking about the people who would buy from him in bulk. “I always asked myself what might have happened with the rugs that were carried off and resold,” he says. “In the end no one knows who made them or where they came from. That has always weighed on me.”

Two years ago, the Contreras family cooperative began exploring how to protect their products. “I went to a meeting in the city of Oaxaca while I was fulfilling a responsibility related to my community,” says Contreras, who is Zapotec. “It had nothing to do with rugs, it was at the health council — but right there in the office, I heard people from the government talking about geographical indications.”

A geographical indication is a name or sign affixed to a product certifying that it possesses certain qualities, is made according to traditional methods or enjoys a good reputation due to its place of origin. This is somewhat different from the better-known denomination of origin, held by Mexican products such as tequila, mezcal and *talavera* pottery produced in Puebla, which is a special subset of geographical indication. (In the former, the link with the place of origin must be stronger, whereas products granted a geographical indication may use some materials sourced from outside the designated region.

“As of 2018, these geographical indications have been added to the industrial property law of Mexico and people have been able to request these protections ever since,” says Claudio Rosas, head of the sectorial department ~~property department~~ within Oaxaca’s Economic Development M~~m~~inistry, speaking to Global Press last December (he has since left the post). Early in 2022 beginning in February, the nation’s official gazette published the first three declarations of geographical indication, awarded to wool rugs from Teotitlán del Valle and neighbouring towns, silk produced from the criollo silkworm, and *tonas* made in the C~~c~~entral V~~v~~alleys of Oaxaca.

The first artisans to request a geographical indication were the makers of *tonas.* Manuel Jim~~é~~enez began making these brightly colored, fantastical creatures from copal wood in the 1960s and 1970s using patterns learned from Pedro Linares, a popular artist in Mexico City in the 1930s, who first fashioned these figures from papier mâché and christened them *alebrijes*. Jiménez had been carving wood to make toys every since he was little, says his son Isaías. “As an adult he continued to make them to sell in downtown Oaxaca city, where people started to ask him to paint them. And then there was his connection to the Linares family, the creators of *alebrijes* in Mexico City — they gave him the pattern to start painting his wood carvings in a similar way.”

With the declarations in place, each group of artisans must now come together to create criteria for products to receive the designation, as required by the World Intellectual Property Organization, a specialized agency of the United Nations that protects intellectual

property worldwide through 23 international treaties~~a regulatory agency of the United Nations (CO)~~. So far, none of the three groups have settled on a set of rules.

San Pedro Cajonos has a longstanding territorial dispute with its neighboring town, which also produces silk. But the artisans are determined not to let this 30-year-conflict stand in their way. “We met in a neutral town because, just as we can’t go to San Miguel Cajonos, they can’t come to our town — but the government requires that all the towns that make the silk be included to successfully obtain the indication,” says Martínez. “We as artisans said to ourselves, ‘we have to move forward, be creative and seek out new ways to improve our situation.’ We all weave. We need to work — and the silk is something that unites us.”

IMAGE CAPTIONS:

GPJNews_Mexico_EAP_GeographicalIndication2_282_L

AP CAPTION: Daysi García (left) weaves silk on her backstrap loom, while her grandmother, Margarita Flores, spins silk thread at Moise´s family workshop ~~the Silkworm Sanctuary~~ in San Pedro Cajonos, Mexico on Nov. 13, 2022.

IMAGE CAPTION: Daysi García, left, weaves silk on her backstrap loom, while her grandmother, Margarita Flores, spins silk thread at ~~the~~ Moise´s family workshop ~~government silkworm sanctuary~~ in San Pedro Cajonos.

****diptych – stacked images****
GPJNews_Mexico_EAP_GeographicalIndication3_229 (top)

AP CAPTION: Moisées Martínez dyes textiles before they are woven on the second floor of his family workshop, ~~at the silkworm sanctuary~~ in San Pedro Cajonos, Mexico on Nov. 14, 2022. In their workshop only natural dyes are used to color the garments they weave.

GPJNews_Mexico_EAP_GeographicalIndication2_202 (bottom)

AP CAPTION: Margarita Flores spins silk on a malacate, the oldest spinning system used in Mexico at Moise´s family workshop ~~in the Silkworm Sanctuary cooperative~~ in San Pedro Cajonos, Mexico on Nov. 13, 2022

IMAGE CAPTION: Silk production was a thriving industry in this area during colonial times and has since been kept alive by dedicated Zapotec artisans such Moisées Martínez, above, and Margarita Flores.

GPJNews_Mexico_EAP_GeographicalIndication2_388
Gladys Garcíia weaves rapacejos with her hands into silk rebozos one of the final details of the garments that have been woven on the backstrap looms at Moise´s Martínez family workshop~~the Silkworm Sanctuary cooperative~~ in San Pedro Cajonos, Mexico on Nov. 13, 2022.

GPJNews_Mexico_EAP_GeographicalIndication3_279

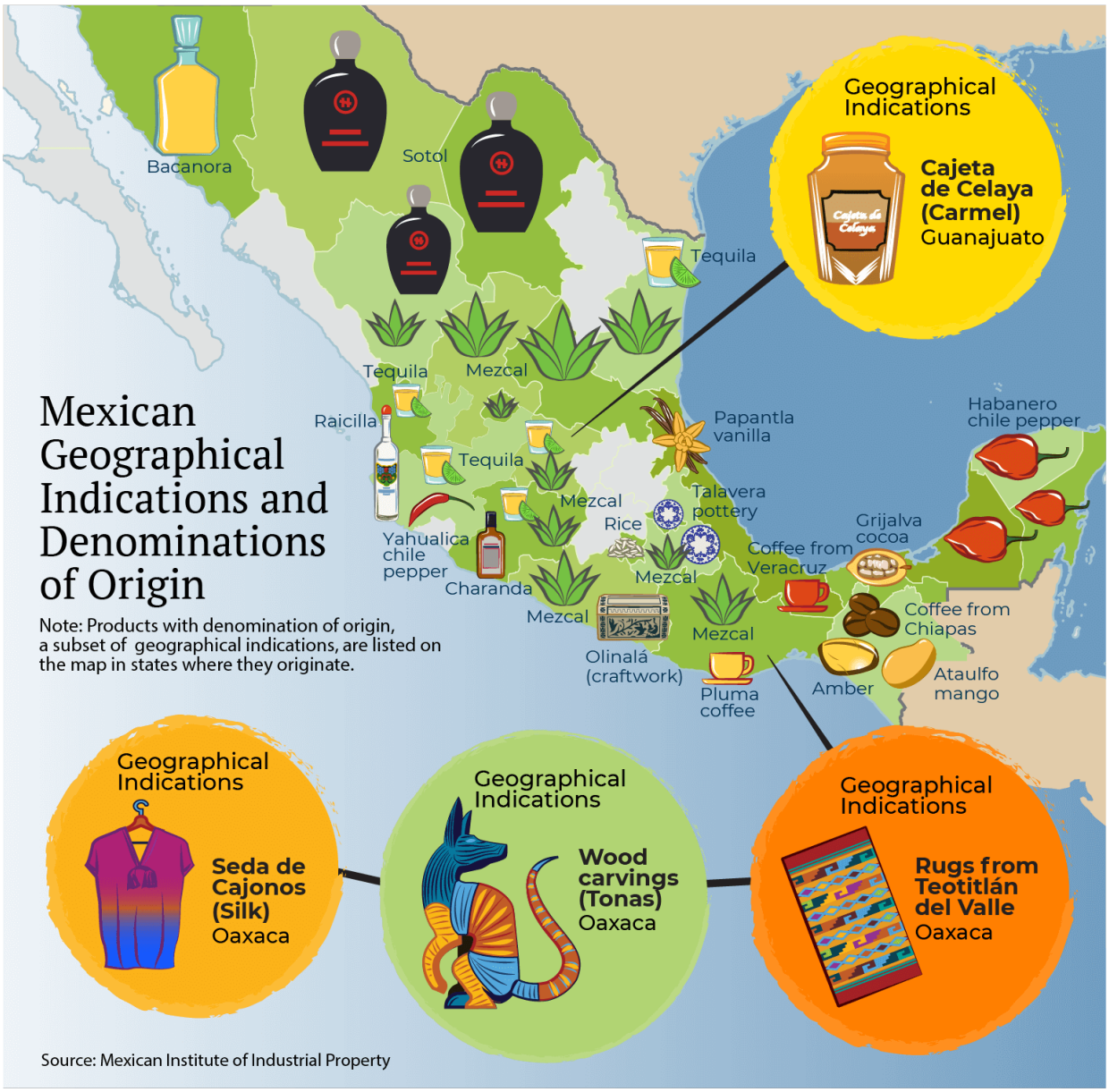
AP CAPTION: Apolonio Martínez sits in the morning sun while his son, Moisés Martínez and daughter-in-law Gladys García tend to the garments they have just dyed at Moise´s Martínez family workshop ~~the Silkworm Sanctuary cooperative~~ in San Pedro Cajonos, Mexico on Nov. 13, 2022.

IMAGE CAPTION: Apolonio Martínez basks in the morning sun while his son Moisés Martínez and daughter-in-law Gladys García tend to the garments they have just dyed at their workshop ~~silkworm sanctuary.~~

GPJNews_Mexico_EAP_GeographicalIndication2_344_T (thumbnail only)

AP CAPTION: Hever Martí~~í~~nez (left) weaves silk thread on a backstrap loom creating a huipil or traditional dress while Alicia Flores spins silk on a mechanical spinner at Moise´s family workshop~~the Silkworm Sanctuary cooperative~~ in San Pedro Cajonos, Mexico on Nov. 13, 2022.

ENGLISH TEXT and Screenshot



Mexican Geographical Indications and Denominations of Origin

Note: Products with denomination of origin, a subset of geographical indications, are listed on the map in states where they originate.

Geographical Indications
Cajeta de Celaya (Carmel)
Guanajuato

Rugs from Teotitlán del Valle
Oaxaca

Seda de Cajonos (Silk)
Oaxaca

Wood carvings (Tonas)
Oaxaca

Charanda
Yahualica chile pepper
Tequila
Olinalá (craftwork)
Rice
Papantla vanilla
Raicilla
Coffee from Veracruz
Talavera pottery
Ataulfo mango
Amber
Coffee fromChiapas
Bacanora
Sotol
Habanerochile pepper
Grijalva cocoa
Mezcal
Pluma coffee

Source: Mexican Institute of Industrial Property

SPANISH (Original text used from Spanish language source. Please confirm that the English translations used above are correct and match the source materials. Thank you. *This note does not need to be translated**)**

Indicaciones Geográficas

Cajeta de Celaya
Guanajuato

Tapetes de Teotitlán del Valle
Oaxaca

Seda de Cajonos
Oaxaca

Tallas de Madera (Tonas)
Oaxaca

Arroz

Café Veracruz
Talavera
Mango Ataulfo
Ámbar
Café Chiapas
Charanda
Yahualica
Tequila
Olinalá
Papantla vanilla
Raicilla
Bacanora
Sotol
Habanerochile
Grijalva cocoa
Mezcal

Fuente: Instituto Mexicano de la Propiedad Industrial; IMPI_Nota: Los productos con denominación de origen_